

MISSOULA  
COUNTY



MISSOULA CITY-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
HEALTH SERVICES  
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February 8,  
2007

The Honorable Rick Jore, Chairman  
House Education Committee  
Montana House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 200400  
Helena, MT 59620-0400

Dear Representative Jore and Members of the House Education Committee,

Missoula City-County Health Department respectfully voices our opposition to **HB 465**, a bill which would revise religious and medical exemptions from immunizations for preschool, school, and childcare establishments.

Our concern is for the health of children in these settings whose parents or guardians want their children to be immunized against pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, Hib, polio, pneumococcal pneumonia, hepatitis A & B, chickenpox, and meningitis, but may not be old enough to receive the complete series of the vaccine. Exposure to these children by a child whose parents are permitted a religious exemption and becomes ill, puts these children at risk for contracting a vaccine preventable disease.

I personally worked as a Public Health Nurse in Alaska when we had an outbreak of Pertussis in 3 villages where the children were not immunized due to religious exemption. The cost of prophylaxis of children & their families in the three communities, to prevent the continued spread of Pertussis was \$35,000.00. Due to the length (2 weeks) of the period of communicable time for transmission of Pertussis, it is not possible to always determine if the symptoms an infant or child displays are for this disease or the common cold. The young and the elderly are most vulnerable to pertussis, but all of us are susceptible. The potential economic impact to the State and the lost employment by parents of ill children is also a concern.

Other vaccine preventable diseases have social, emotional and economic effects. Many of us have seen the effects of vaccine preventable diseases in our lifetime, but many have not. An un-immunized child who contracts Hib meningitis can have long term cognitive deficits and the cost of care, special education, and emotional trauma to family can be devastating.

We know you care about the citizens of Montana and urge you to consider our concerns as **HB 465** is reviewed in the House Education Committee. Please feel free to contact me for any further information @ 258-4986 or by email @ [serstadj@ho.missoula.mt.us](mailto:serstadj@ho.missoula.mt.us).

We thank and appreciate your dedication and service to the great State of Montana!

Sincerely,

Julie A. Serstad, RN, BSN, MSN  
Health Services Director